

The Book of Leviticus

Lesson 11: The Sanctity of Blood and Holy Living -- Leviticus 17:1–18:30

Some chapters of the Bible whisper, and some chapters thunder. Leviticus 17 and 18 thunder. After the high drama of the Day of Atonement, God now presses His holiness down into the everyday life of His people, into the way they kill an animal for dinner and into the most intimate corners of the bedroom. Holiness, it turns out, is not confined to the tabernacle on one solemn day. It reaches the kitchen and the marriage bed. The God who is holy in His sanctuary means to make His people holy in their homes.

Chapter 17 settles a foundational matter: blood belongs to God. Israel was not to slaughter sacrifices wherever they pleased or eat the blood of any creature, because, God says, the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul (17:11). That single verse is one of the most important sentences in the whole book. It tells us why blood matters, why sacrifice works, and why, in the fullness of time, the Son of God would shed His own blood to redeem us.

Chapter 18 turns to the sanctity of the family and the marriage bed. God lays out His moral design for human sexuality, the lifelong one-flesh union of one man and one woman, and forbids everything that violates it: incest, adultery, the offering of children to the god Molech, homosexual acts, and bestiality. These are not arbitrary rules. They are the guardrails God built around the gift of sexuality, and He warns that when a people trample them, the very land is defiled and spits its inhabitants out. This is sober ground, and we will walk it with both clarity and compassion.

Hold the two chapters together and you see one message: God claims all of life. He claims our worship, symbolized by the blood He reserves for the altar, and He claims our bodies, our families, our most private choices. We are studying a law that has been fulfilled and taken away in Christ, yet its great moral truths still stand, and its central verse about the blood points like an arrow to the cross. Read these chapters not as a list of ancient taboos but as the voice of a holy God who loves His people enough to tell them the truth about life, blood, and love.

Group Discussion: Leviticus 17 and 18 show God claiming both our worship (the blood) and our most private moral choices (the family and marriage bed). Why do we sometimes try to divide life into a religious part that belongs to God and a private part we keep for ourselves? What would it look like to let God be Lord of all of it?

Personal Reflection: Is there an area of your life, perhaps your habits, your relationships, or your private choices, that you have quietly fenced off from God's lordship? What would it take this week to surrender that area to Him as fully as you have surrendered others?

Read Leviticus 17:1–18:30

Study Questions

1. Why did God forbid Israel from offering sacrifices anywhere they pleased and require all sacrifices to be brought to the door of the tabernacle (17:1-9)? What did this teach about acceptable worship being on God's terms rather than ours?
2. Where are you tempted to worship God on your own terms rather than His, choosing what feels meaningful to you over what He has actually authorized? How do you discern the difference?
3. Why was the eating of blood so strictly forbidden (17:10-14), and what reason does God give in verse 11 about the life being in the blood? What does this reverence for blood teach about the seriousness of life and atonement?
4. How does knowing that life itself belongs to God, symbolized in His claim on the blood, shape the way you value your own life and the lives of others?
5. In chapter 18, God grounds His moral commands by repeatedly saying I am the LORD your God (18:2-5). Why does God anchor moral standards in who He is rather than in human opinion or culture? What changes when morality is rooted in God's character?

6. We live in a culture that often says each person should define right and wrong for themselves. How do you personally resist the pull to let the surrounding culture, rather than God's Word, define what is good?
7. Read God's design for marriage and sexuality in chapter 18, where He forbids incest, adultery, child sacrifice to Molech, homosexual acts, and bestiality. What positive design for human sexuality and marriage is God protecting, and how does the New Testament reaffirm these same moral truths (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Hebrews 13:4)?
8. God warns that these sins defile not only the individual but the land itself (18:24-28). How seriously do you take the way your private moral choices affect your family, your church, and your community?
9. Leviticus 17:11 says it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul. Trace this principle from the altar of Leviticus to the cross of Christ (Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Ephesians 1:7). Why must atonement come through blood, and how does the blood of Christ accomplish fully and forever what the blood of animals could only picture? Address what this means for our cleansing and our hope, including the hope held out to all who have sinned sexually (1 Corinthians 6:11).
10. Chapter 18 ends with a call to keep God's statutes and not defile yourselves (18:30). Where is God calling you to holiness in the area of your body, your relationships, or your purity, and what one step of obedience will you take?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 9:22, without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins; 1 Peter 1:18-19, we were redeemed not with corruptible things but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish; Romans 1:24-27, God's moral design for sexuality reaffirmed in the New Covenant; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, such were some of you but you are washed, sanctified, and justified; Hebrews 13:4, marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled.

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